

An old friend contacted me on Instant Messenger last Saturday (a curiously un-discussed medium for musical communication- is this less popular than it used to be?), with an invitation to watch his music session on a live webcast from “DNBTV” (<http://dnbtv.com/>). Ian has been working as a drum and bass DJ/producer (I’m still not sure of the preferred term for the music’s practitioners) since I met him in the music industry program at ASU, and is now living/working in Los Angeles. Through a number of conversations over several years, I as not a ‘devoted’ fan of the genre have come to admire what I see as a positive solution to working outside of the fundamentally oppressive conditions of the big four. I believe these should be shared concerns for any person e/affected by popular music.

Practitioners of Drum and Bass, as well as other derivative genres that originated from the blanket genre of ‘House Music’, have been by nature a tightly knit collaborative community, sharing each other’s work in regional ‘scenes’ until the popularization and perfection of the internet as a means for communication over the past 10-15 years. As a non-mainstream genre, Drum and Bass has thrived through grassroots action, embracing music making and dispersal in a communal fashion, made possible through the negation of space as a factor as a catalyst for cohesive, small group dynamics to be effective. Networking technologies as well as the negation of space as a preventative factor in the exchange of music and performer/audience relationships within small group conditions has created a potentially fruitful condition for exploring new ways to think outside the artist/performer/composer box. A problem with these barriers in the case of popular has been at least partially created by the poor, philosophically unsound and atrophied business models executed by the big four (we’ve officially as a society conveniently moved beyond, and forgotten the ‘big three’). A discussion of popular music necessitates a consideration of its existing economic ‘superstructure’. In the form of a Jeopardy response, which I’ve always thought was wonderful for it’s seemingly backward answer-question sequencing:

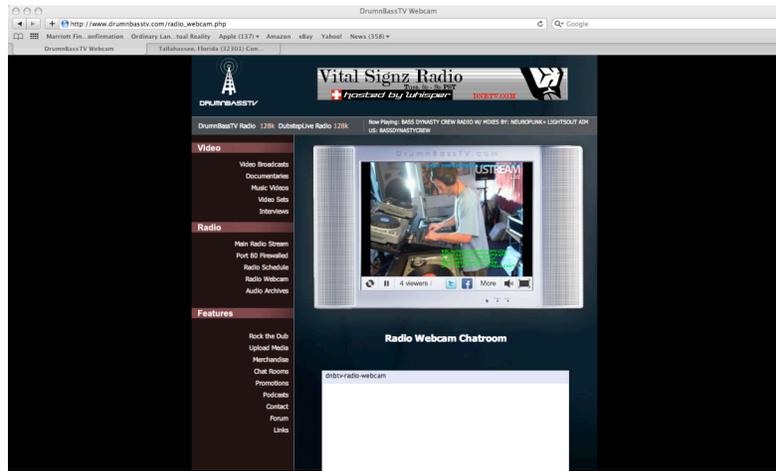
Answer: A market in which control over the supply of a commodity is in the hands of a small number of producers and each one can influence prices and affect competitors (wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn)

Question: What is an Oligopoly?

I consider this more than enough reason to justify the exploration of new systems that operate outside of the existing one. In DNBTV, one may consider future social models that ‘endorse human activity’ (a phrase I borrow from filmmaker Jean-Pierre Gorin), as music by nature should. I would like to characterize future music creation/dispersion/fandom within a gilded framework. Although DNBTV at face value would appear to be an Internet radio/TV channel, devoted to presenting drum and bass (as well as related house music genres such as dubstep), closer examination brings elements of ‘community’ into relief. I should clarify that rather than focusing on specifics of the organizations infrastructure, I am primarily concerned with the fundamental principle of the organization function as demonstrated through the website’s design and capabilities.

The front page features a sleek design that reflects the futuristic/sci-fi aesthetic that is currently popular within the genre. A bar at the very top of the page includes links to the website’s primary feature, DrumnBasssTV Radio and DubstepLive Radio (Dubstep is a closely related genre to drum and bass music that features overt influences from Jamaican ‘dub’). A large database of uploaded user content is available as a feature within Dnbtv’s streaming content (the website accepts content submissions which are open to the public). Although the criteria for submitted content is not specifically articulated on the site, the form suggests that the hosts are generally open to anything related to drum and bass music. This reflects the blur between audience and performer that is existent within the genre, as many fans themselves are makers of the music. DNBTV’s web-radio service provides typically two three-hour sets daily from DnB practitioners across the continental US. This week’s schedule includes sets broadcast from California, Washington (State), Virginia and Philadelphia. DNBTV also provides

streaming video content to accompany some sets. As a community oriented feature, live performance pages feature an on-screen chat dialogue window for viewers to comment.



The website features discussion forums for fans to discuss drum and bass related topics. Aside from performances, the website offers links to other multimedia such as independent DnB labels, affiliated artist music videos and interviews.